

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 11-12 and 17-18 without prejudice or disclaimer, amend claims 1-10, 12-16 and 19, add new claims 20-21 as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of designating a database search path₁[[:]]
the method comprising:
a first step of automatically displaying databases ~~that can~~ to be designated as search targets[[,]] in the form of figures on a screen, each of the databases containing records with search keys of related records stored in other databases;
a second step of designating individual two figures ~~and designating the of~~ databases ~~corresponding to the designated figures~~ as ~~the first~~ a starting database and [[the]] a terminal database respectively; [[and]]
a third step of automatically carrying out a chain-reactive retrieval of search keys and records ~~by following two steps, one of said two steps comprising retrieving records by using~~ entering a starting search key by an user that is entered into [[a]] the starting database to retrieve a record therefrom, and another of said two steps comprising entering automatically retrieving a next search key which is different from the starting search key and contained in said retrieved record[[s]], and automatically entering the next search key into a next database to retrieve a next record therefrom in a chain-reactive manner from the starting database via a plurality of intervening databases to the terminal database; and
a fourth step of automatically linking and displaying the starting database, the intervening databases, and the terminal database linked as through the search path candidates.
2. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, wherein the third step includes the step of displaying in highlight a database search path selected among the search path candidates in the form of figures by which the figures indicating the individual databases are connected.
3. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim [[1]] 2, wherein the third step includes the step of selecting the database search path by designating an intervening database to be included therein such that the database search path narrowing the search path candidates down to only those that passes through all of the databases corresponding to said designated intervening database, figures other than the [[first]] starting database and the terminal database.

4. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 2, wherein the third step includes the step of selecting the database search path by designating an intervening database to be eliminated therefrom such that the database search path narrowing the search path candidates to only those that does not pass through all of the databases corresponding to said designated intervening database figures other than the first database and terminal database.
5. (Canceled)
6. (Currently Amended) A program for causing a computer to ~~carry out a method of designating~~ designate a database search path comprising steps of:
 - a first ~~[[step]]~~ module of automatically displaying databases ~~that can to be designated~~ as search targets~~[[,]]~~ in the form of figures on a screen, each of the databases containing records with search keys of related records stored in other databases;
 - a second ~~[[step]]~~ module of designating ~~individual two~~ figures and designating the ~~of~~ databases ~~corresponding to the designated figures~~ as the first a starting database and ~~[[the]]~~ a terminal database respectively; [[and]]
 - a third ~~[[step]]~~ module of automatically carrying out a chain-reactive retrieval of search keys and records ~~by following two steps, one of said two steps comprising retrieving records by using~~ entering a starting search key by an user that is entered into [[a]] the starting database to retrieve a record therefrom, and another of said two steps comprising entering automatically retrieving a next search key which is different from the starting search key and contained in said retrieved record[[s]], and automatically entering the next search key into a next database to retrieve a next record therefrom in a chain-reactive manner from the starting database via a plurality of intervening databases to the terminal database; and
 - a fourth module of automatically linking and displaying the starting database, the intervening databases, and the terminal database linked as through the search path candidates.
7. (Currently Amended) The program according to claim 6, wherein the third ~~[[step]]~~ module includes the ~~[[step]]~~ module of displaying in highlight a database search path selected among the search path candidates in the form of figures by which the figures indicating the individual databases are connected.

8. (Currently Amended) The program according to claim ~~[[6]]~~ 7, wherein the third ~~[[step]]~~ module includes the ~~[[step]]~~ module of selecting the database search path by designating an intervening database to be included therein such that the database search path narrowing the search path candidates down to only those that passes through all of the databases corresponding to said designated intervening database, figures other than the ~~[[first]]~~ starting database and the terminal database.
9. (Currently Amended) The program according to claim 7, wherein the third ~~[[step]]~~ module includes the ~~[[step]]~~ module of selecting the database search path by designating an intervening database to be eliminated therefrom such that the database search path ~~the third step includes the step of narrowing the search path candidates to only those that does not pass through all of the databases corresponding to said designated intervening database figures other than the first database and terminal database.~~
10. (Currently Amended) The program according to claim 6, further comprising at least one of either one or both of the following steps:
 a module of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key first database, only those figures corresponding to databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight designated as the first starting database candidates, on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures;
 and
 a module of displaying, upon designation of the terminal starting database, only those figures corresponding to next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to [[can]] be designated as the terminal database[[,]] on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures.
- 11-12. (Cancelled)
13. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising at least one of either one or both of the following steps:
 a step of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key first database, only those figures corresponding to databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight designated as the first starting database candidates, on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures;
 and

a step of displaying, upon designation of the terminal starting database, only those figures corresponding to next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to [[can]] be designated as the terminal database[[,]] on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures.

14. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 2, further comprising at least one of either one or both of the following steps:

a step of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key first database, only those figures corresponding to databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight designated as the first starting database candidates, on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures; and

a step of displaying, upon designation of the terminal starting database, only those figures corresponding to next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to [[can]] be designated as the terminal database[[,]] on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures.

15. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 4, further comprising at least one of either one or both of the following steps:

a step of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key first database, only those figures corresponding to databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight designated as the first starting database candidates, on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures; and

a step of displaying, upon designation of the terminal starting database, only those figures corresponding to next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to [[can]] be designated as the terminal database[[,]] on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures.

16. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim [[11]]3, further comprising at least one of either one or both of the following steps:

a step of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key first database, only those figures corresponding to databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight designated as the first starting database candidates, on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures; and

a step of displaying, upon designation of the ~~terminal~~ starting database, only those figures corresponding to next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to [[can]] be designated as the terminal database[[,]] on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures.

17-18. (Cancelled)

19. (Currently Amended) The [[method]] program according to claim [[12]]7, further comprising at least one of either one or both of the following steps:

a module of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key first database, only those figures corresponding to databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight designated as the first starting database candidates; on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures; and

a module of displaying, upon designation of the ~~terminal~~ starting database, only those figures corresponding to next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to [[can]] be designated as the terminal database[[,]] on the screen, preferably with a feature distinguishing them from other databases figures.

20. (New) The program according to claim 8, further comprising at least one of:

a module of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key, only databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight as the starting database candidates on the screen distinguishing from other databases; and

a module of displaying, upon designation of the starting database, only next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to be designated as the terminal database on the screen distinguishing from other databases.

21. (New) The program according to claim 9, further comprising at least one of:

a module of displaying, upon designation of the starting search key, only databases that can be searched with the starting search key in highlight as the starting database candidates on the screen distinguishing from other databases; and

a module of displaying, upon designation of the starting database, only next databases that contains a next search key and a next record in highlight to be designated as the terminal database on the screen distinguishing from other databases.